India hopes to achieve WHO’s doctor-people ratio by 2028

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NEW DELHI: India will take at least 17 more years before it can reach the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended norm of one doctor per 1,000 people.

The Planning Commission's high-level expert group (HLEG) on universal health coverage (UHC) - headed by Dr K Srinath Reddy - has predicted the availability of one allopathic doctor per 1,000 people by 2028. It has suggested setting up 187 medical colleges in 17 high focus states during the 12th and 13th five-year Plan to achieve the target.

HLEG estimates that the number of allopathic doctors registered with the Medical Council of India (MCI) has increased since 1974 to 6.12 lakhs in 2011 - a ratio of one doctor for 1,953 people or a density of 0.5 doctors per 1,000 people.

The nation has a density of one medical college per 38.41 lakhs. There are 315 medical colleges that are located in 188 of 642 districts.

There is only one medical college for a population of 115 lakhs in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (95 lakhs), Madhya Pradesh (73 lakhs) and Rajasthan (68 lakhs). Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu each have one medical college for a population of 15 lakhs, 16 lakhs and 19 lakhs, respectively.

The HLEG has proposed a phased addition of 187 colleges. It expects that by 2015 under phase A, 59 new medical colleges will admit students in 15 states like Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. By 2017, 13 of these states will have an additional 70 medical colleges, and by 2022, another 58 institutes will be built in two additional phases (2017-2020 and 2020-2022).

By 2022, India will have one medical college per 25 lakh population in all states except Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The implementation of HLEG's recommendations will enable the additional availability of 1.2 lakh doctors by 2017, and another 1.9 lakh doctors between 2017 and 2022.

"With this rate of growth, it is expected that the HLEG target of one doctor per 1,000 will be achieved by 2028," the report says.

It recommends that along with establishment of new medical colleges, the admission capacities of existing colleges in the public sector should also be increased. Partnerships with the private sector should be encouraged, with conditional reservation of 50% of seats for local candidates, fixed admission fees and government reimbursement of fees for local candidates. The revised MBBS curriculum proposed by the MCI should be refined to put greater focus on preventive, promotive and rehabilitative healthcare.
"Measures such as a compulsory posting of one year for all MBBS graduates immediately after internship, with 10% extra marks weightage for one year of rural service and 20% extra marks for two years of rural service in the post-graduate entrance examination should be included," the report suggests.

The World Health Statistics Report (2011) says, the density of doctors in India is six for a population of 10,000. India is ranked 52 among 57 countries facing human resource crunch in healthcare.

Between 2001 and 2005, India had a doctor: population ratio of 0.5 per 1,000 population in comparison to 0.3 in Thailand, Sri Lanka (0.4), China (1.6), the UK (5.4), the US (5.5) and Cuba (5.9).

The nation has the largest number of medical colleges in the world, with an annual churning rate of over 30,000 doctors and 18,000 specialists. However, the average annual output is 100 graduates per medical college in comparison to 110 in North America, Central Europe (125), Western Europe (149) and Eastern Europe (220). China, which has 188 colleges, produces 1,75,000 doctors annually, with an average of 930 graduates per institute.